

REMARKS

Favorable reconsideration of this application in light of the following discussion is respectfully requested.

Claims 1-2, 4-8, 10-14 and 16-33 are presently active in this case. The present Amendment amends Claims 1, 2, 7, 8, 13, 14, 19, 20 and 21; cancels Claims 3, 9 and 15 and adds new Claims 22-33.

The outstanding Office Action rejects Claims 1-2, 4-8, 10-12, 19, and 20 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as unpatentable over Hoffman, et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,771,916, herein "Hoffman") in view of Okado, et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,137,977, herein "Okado"); rejects Claims 13-14, 16-18, and 21 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as unpatentable over Moriki, et al. (U.S. Patent No. 6,077,636, herein "Moriki") in view of Hoffman and Okado; and objects to Claims 3, 9, and 15 as dependent upon a rejected base claim, but indicates that Claims 3, 9, and 15 will be allowable if rewritten in independent form including all of the limitations of the base claim and any intervening claims. Applicants appreciatively acknowledge the identification of the allowable subject matter.

In order to vary the scope of protection recited in the claims, new Claims 22-33 are added. New independent Claims 22-27 recite all the features of original independent Claims 1, 7, 13, 19, 20 and 21 respectively, and further recite "an image forming module is removably mounted to a casing of an apparatus body; the image forming module includes the photoconductive element, charger and developing unit; and the air conditioning means sends dehumidified air into the individual image forming module."¹ New dependent Claims 28-33 depend upon Claims 22-27, respectively and recite "air sent into an image forming module is discharged to the outside of the image forming module only via an image transfer opening through which part of the photoconductive element is exposed to the outside of the image

¹ Finds support in Applicants' Specification at page 8, lines 1-2, page 8, lines 18-24 and page 10, lines 15-20.

forming casing.”² Since these claims find non-limiting support in the Specification as originally filed, they are therefore not believed to raise any question on new matter.³

In response to the rejections of Claims 1-2, 4-8, 10-12, 19, and 20 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) and Claims 13-14, 16-18 and 21 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a), Applicants respectfully traverse the rejection. However, in the spirit of moving the prosecution of the Application forward, independent Claim 1 is amended to recite all the features of allowable Claim 3 with some features of dependent Claim 2. The amendment to Claim 1 recites “wherein an image forming module accommodates said photoconductive element and said means for dehumidifying is disposed in the image forming module.” Consequently, Claim 3 is cancelled and the features of Claim 2 now claimed in independent Claim 1, to recite “accommodating said photoconductive element,” are cancelled from Claim 2.

Further, independent Claim 7 is amended to recite all the features of allowable Claim 9 with some features of dependent Claim 8. The amendment to Claim 7 recites “wherein a plurality of image forming modules each accommodates one of said plurality of photoconductive elements and said means for dehumidifying is disposed in each of said image forming modules.” Consequently, Claim 9 is cancelled and the features of Claim 8 now claimed in independent Claim 7, to recite “each accommodating one of said plurality of photoconductive elements,” are cancelled from Claim 8.

Independent Claim 13 is amended to recite all the features of allowable Claim 15 with some features of dependent Claim 14. The amendment to Claim 13 recites “wherein an image forming module accommodates said photoconductive element and said means for dehumidifying is disposed in the image forming module.” Consequently, Claim 15 is cancelled and the features of Claim 14 now claimed in independent Claim 13, to recite

² Finds support in Applicants’ Specification from page 9, line 22 to page 10, line 10.

³ See MPEP 2163.06 stating that “information contained in any one of the specification, claims or drawings of the application as filed may be added to any other part of the application without introducing new matter.”

“accommodating said photoconductive element,” are cancelled from Claim 14.

Furthermore, independent Claims 19, 20 and 21 are amended to recite the allowable features of Claims 3, 9 and 15, respectively and to recite features of dependent Claims 2, 8 and 14.

The feature regarding an image forming module accommodating the photoconductive element and the means for dehumidifying disposed in the image forming module is believed to be patentably distinct over the applied references without reciting further limitations of the intervening Claims 2, 8 and 14, since none of the cited references Hoffman as well as Okado recite such a feature.

In view of the amendments to all the independent claims, the rejections under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) are believed to be overcome and Applicants respectfully request reconsideration of the rejections.

Further, the new independent Claims 22-33 recite a combination of features that cannot be found in the applied references. Hoffman does not teach or suggest that an image forming module, including a photoconductive element, a charger and a developing unit, is removably mounted to a case of an apparatus body. On the contrary, Hoffman teaches that first and second interior volumes are separated by a separating member.⁴ Therefore, Hoffman does not mention that the second interior volume is removably mounted to the case of the apparatus body. Further, it is difficult to combine a usual process cartridge with Hoffman's configuration in which the first and second interior volumes are provided integrally with each other. Hoffman also does not teach or suggest a plurality of image forming modules. Hoffman simply describes that “the dotted line 240 indicates a division

⁴ See Hoffman in the Abstract and in Fig. 1A.

between module M1 and module M2, which division may represent a partial wall, or no wall.”⁵

Furthermore, Moriki also does not teach an image forming module, including a photoconductive element, a charger and a development unit, configured in a way that an image forming module is removably mounted to the case of an apparatus body.

Consequently, in view of the present amendment, no further issues are believed to be outstanding in the present application, and the present application is believed to be in condition for formal Allowance. A Notice of Allowance for Claims 1-2, 4-8, 10-14 and 16-33 is earnestly solicited.

Should the Examiner deem that any further action is necessary to place this application in even better form for allowance, the Examiner is encouraged to contact Applicants' undersigned representative at the below listed telephone number.

Respectfully submitted,

OBLON, SPIVAK, McCLELLAND,
MAIER & NEUSTADT, P.C.



Gregory J. Maier
Attorney of Record
Registration No. 25,599

Customer Number
22850

Tel: (703) 413-3000
Fax: (703) 413 -2220
(OSMMN 08/03)

Surinder Sachar
Registration No. 34,423

I:\ATTY\NS\00557\239799US\239799US-AM2-DRAFT3.DOC

⁵ See Hoffman at column 16, lines 1-4.